

Opening Statement
Chairman Mark Souder

“Fiscal Year 2006 Drug Budget”

Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy,
and Human Resources
Committee on Government Reform

February 10, 2005

Good morning, and thank you all for coming. Today we are holding our Subcommittee's first official hearing of the 109th Congress, and it is very appropriate that our topic is the federal drug budget – the money that the U.S. government spends to reduce drug abuse, whether through law enforcement, drug treatment, or drug use prevention. Since its creation, this Subcommittee's primary mission has been to oversee all aspects of the federal government's approach to the drug abuse problem. This hearing will go to the heart of that mission.

When evaluating drug control policies, we must always apply one simple test: do the policies reduce illegal drug use? That is the ultimate “performance measure” for any drug control policy, whether it is related to enforcement, treatment, or prevention. And if we apply that test, the Bush Administration is doing very well. Drug use, particularly among young people, is down since President Bush took office in 2001. Under this Administration, we have seen an 11 percent reduction in drug use, and over the past three years there has been an historic 17 percent decrease in teenage drug use. That is in stark contrast to what happened in the mid- to late-1990s, when drug use – particularly among teenagers – rose dramatically after major declines in the 1980s and early 1990s.

These statistics show that the policies pursued by this Administration and the Congress are working. The combination of tough and vigorous law enforcement, treatment for those suffering from drug addiction, and non-nonsense drug abuse prevention and education programs, has yielded significant positive results. Our goal is to continue and build on that success by identifying which specific policies are working best, which ones could use improvement, and which ones are not working.

The President submitted his overall budget request on Monday. Although the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) has not yet issued its annual

“Drug Budget Summary” or its annual National Drug Control Strategy, our review of the overall budget proposal reveals the outlines of the President’s drug policy priorities.

First, the President is proposing a significant boost to federal law enforcement and drug interdiction operations. I support that increase. Without a credible deterrent to trafficking, the supply of drugs will simply overwhelm our other programs. Treatment and prevention will not work if drugs are not only plentiful and cheap, but there is no legal penalty or social stigma attached to their sale and use.

The President’s boost to federal law enforcement agencies, however, is accompanied by a substantial proposed reduction in federal assistance to state and local law enforcement. The Administration is asking Congress to eliminate funding for the Byrne Grants program, to cut funding for the Methamphetamine “Hot Spots” grant program by over 60%, and to cut funding for the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) program by more than 50%. The HIDTA program budget cuts would be accompanied by a transfer of the remaining funds to the Justice Department’s Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF), effectively terminating the program as it currently exists.

These cuts would certainly have a very dramatic impact on drug enforcement at the state and local level, at least in the short term. I am also concerned that the damage to federal, state, and local law enforcement cooperation would be even more long-lasting. Most drug enforcement takes place at the state and local level. We need to be very sure that we continue to treat state and local agencies as partners in this effort.

Second, the President is proposing modest increases in drug treatment programs from their currently appropriated levels. I welcome these increases, and believe that this Administration is taking positive steps to improve the performance and accountability of treatment programs. Without effective performance evaluation, it will be impossible for Congress and the public to judge whether various treatment programs are worth the substantial investment they require. I am particularly encouraged by the Administration’s continuing commitment to its ground-breaking Access To Recovery (ATR) initiative, which seeks to increase the availability of drug treatment services and to give patients greater control over the kind of service they receive.

Third, the President is proposing deep cuts or level funding for many of our major drug use prevention programs. The Administration is specifically asking for the elimination of the Safe and Drug-Free Schools program, and the level

funding of the Drug-Free Communities program and the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign. I have serious concerns about this.

It is true that many prevention programs (particularly the Safe and Drug-Free Schools program) have had difficulty maintaining an anti-drug focus, and demonstrating results in terms of reduced drug use. However, terminating them outright, or refusing to fully fund them, sends the message that the federal government is backing away from prevention. Reducing demand is a crucial element of drug control policy. Rather than terminate prevention programs, we should look for ways to improve them by forcing them to measure their real impact on drug use. The Media Campaign, for example, has already done this – its studies show that the advertising is reaching its intended audience and increasing their perception of the harms of drug use. The resulting reduction in youth drug use is the ultimate measure of success.

In addition to our discussion of the budget, we will also be addressing the role and future of ONDCP itself. ONDCP, which was established in 1989, is intended to act as the principal advisor to the President on drug control issues, and to coordinate all aspects of the federal government's drug control policies. I have ongoing concerns, however, about how much impact ONDCP is having on Administration policy.

For example, ONDCP appears to have been largely absent in the ongoing debate over how to address the rapid expansion of Afghan opium production since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. Many of my colleagues and I have been very disappointed in the failure of the Defense Department to take effective action against the heroin traffic in Afghanistan. ONDCP needs to take a more visible and active role in bringing the Defense Department and other agencies together to craft a workable, effective anti-heroin strategy in Afghanistan.

We plan to address these and many other issues today, as we begin the budget process and our work on the reauthorization of ONDCP and its programs this year. We thank our principal witness, Director John Walters of ONDCP, for agreeing to come and testify today. We also welcome Professor Peter Reuter, a former drug policy advisor to the Clinton Administration, whose testimony was requested by the minority. We thank everyone for taking the time to join us, and look forward to your testimony.